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COBURN JUDITH  
Soc 4.01.2 My war with  
the CIA

Sihanouk, Norodom

## 'Cambodia statements are now inoperative'

by Judith Coburn

WASHINGTON, D. C.—Cambodian Prince Norodom Sihanouk's recently published memoirs, "My War with the CIA," should be on the required summer reading list of the members of the Senate Armed Services Committee. The book is full of leads, charges, and persuasive evidence of a sleazy, 20-year history of American involvement in Cambodia. With the committee's recent expose of the Nixon administration's secret, 14-month bombing campaign against Cambodia, the hearings could provide a forum for a full airing of U. S./Cambodia relations, equal to the historic 1966-67 Fulbright hearings on Vietnam.

But the hearings have not been such a forum, at least not so far. With that peculiar congressional myopia, the hearings have focused not on the raids themselves, but on the elaborate system of falsification of records designed to keep them secret. As usual, the senators seem less shocked by what happened than

by the fact they weren't told. Hal Knight, the Air Force major who exposed the raids, testified himself that he supported the raids but decided to talk because of the policy of falsifying the records.

Knight's testimony described goings-on that would titillate Howard Hunt. As top man at a radar site in South Vietnam, Knight aided B-52s on night raids in Cambodia that were reported as occurring inside South Vietnam. Anonymous callers from Strategic Air Command offices in Saigon told him when to pick up the secret targeting orders, they arrived in plain brown wrappers, and he was instructed to burn the records by daylight to make sure all evidence was destroyed. Knight says after every secret mission he called SAC and said something like "the ball game is over."

At first blush, the obvious parallel was with the Lavelle raids. Both the Lavelle and the Cambodia raids involved falsification of reports and both were exposed by Senator Harold Hughes and in later Armed Services Committee hearings. But there the similarity ends. The major unresolved question in the Lavelle case is whether

the raids were authorized higher than Lavelle. On the other hand, the Pentagon has already admitted the 3630 B-52 raids on Cambodia in 1969-70 were planned by the White House. In the Lavelle case, the raids were carried out under the murky and implausible rubric of "protective reaction." Most reporters believed this was nothing but cosmetics, but could not prove it until Sergeant Lonnie Franks testified that pilots had told him they were bombing without being attacked. Even after the committee's hearings, however, the question in the Lavelle case remained as to whether the "protective reaction" system was conceived by the administration as a "cover" for actual planned raids, or whether there actually were en-

forced rules of engagement which Lavelle and his hotshot pilots violated on their own.

More parallels are being drawn on Capitol Hill between the Cambodia raids and Watergate than with the Lavelle incidents. While there is still a question whether the Lavelle raids were authorized by the Pentagon or the White House, official Washington accepts the notion they were a kind of free-lance excess by Lavelle and his pilots. The Cambodia raids, on the other hand, speak to the lessons of Watergate: that Richard Nixon apparently believes the President has the power to make and execute policy regardless of whether it is illegal, secret, or unauthorized by Congress, the courts, or the executive agencies traditionally responsible. Like many of the events grouped as "Watergate," the Cambodia raids were characterized by an elaborate administration plot to keep information and planning of the raids out of the hands of the traditional channels. The Armed Services Committee has found that the

raids were planned by a handful of White House and Pentagon officials, who apparently did not even trust the military's own classified reporting system.

The Cambodia raids, also like Watergate, were characterized by a massive cover-up. On April 30, 1970, on the eve of the invasion, President Nixon told the nation, "For five years neither the U. S. nor South Vietnam has moved against enemy sanctuaries (in Cambodia) because we did not wish to violate the territory of a neutral nation." Secretary Rogers told the Foreign Relations Committee in April 1970, "Our hands are clean." In 1971 and 1972 the Pentagon submitted a classified record of bombing in Indochina to the Armed Services Committee which did not mention the Cambodia raids. Denials too numerous to catalog were made to individual journalists and congressmen until the raids were recently exposed.

Also like Watergate, the administration has admitted the incidents took place, but no one has stepped forward to take responsibility for the cover-up. The ultimate in what might be called "the Watergate defense" was taken by General George S. Brown when he told the New York Times, "For falsification to constitute an offense, there must be proof of 'intent to deceive.' This is

a highly prescribed element of the offense and is negated when the report is submitted in conformity with orders from a higher authority in possession of the true facts." Hal Knight had an answer for that one, though. When Senator Strom Thurmond, a hostile questioner, asked him why he had violated military security and reported the raids, Knight said, "Senator, I didn't take an oath to support the military, I took an oath to support and defend the Constitution, and that goes beyond strictly military channels." Knight also testified that he had been told the secrecy was not to keep the enemy from knowing (since the bombings were falling on them, they presumably knew) but to hide the raids from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The one actual link between Watergate and the Cambodia raids poses the real conundrum. William Beecher's May 9, 1969, article in the New York Times ex-

posing the Cambodia raids so angered the White House that the first steps to create the plumbers unit were taken. But if the White House thought the story was so explosive why was there no response to news of the raids by the press or Congress? While the senators and the press have justly charged the administration with a cover-up of the raids, they can be charged with "benign neglect" themselves. (The administration said it had briefed a number of hawkish senators about the raids three years ago on a classified basis, a common practice.)

The current brouhaha is even more curious given the mass of evidence available as early as 1965 of U. S. bombing raids and ground incursions in neutral Cambodia. (The hearings so far have focused only on the 1969-70 raids, the only ones admitted by the Pentagon.) Sihanouk's book tails the Cambodian government's protests over bombs, napalm, and defoliation strikes as early as 1963. By 1967, the raids had been corroborated by French

and Australian journalists, and in 1966, a CBS team filmed an American helicopter attack on a Cambodian village. In 1969, note American biologist Arthur Westing made public a report detailing defoliation operations in rubber plantations and villages in northeast Cambodia. Even Senator Mike Mansfield says he was aware of American air raids when he visited Cambodia in 1967.

Sihanouk's book also details protests made in the '60s about U. S. South Vietnamese, and Thai incursions across the border in the '60s. One incursion in early 1967, an Australian journalist

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